

Suggested Remarks
Jon Lindborg, USAID Mission Director
Small Claims Pilot Courts Public Launching
En Banc Session Hall, Supreme Court, Manila
2:00 p.m., September 30, 2008

Chief Justice Reynato Puno

(Other notable guests to be supplied on site)

Distinguished guests, colleagues in development, friends, ladies and gentlemen;

Magandang umaga sa inyong lahat.

Thank you very much for inviting me to this Public Launching of the Small Claims Pilot Courts. I am honored to be with all of you today at this very important occasion.

The U.S. Government through USAID is very pleased to support the Supreme Court's pilot program to introduce small claims courts to

the Philippines. In the United States, small claims cases account for as much as 40 percent of the cases filed in many States, and we believe that in the Philippines, an equally high percentage of cases will fall under the jurisdiction of small claims courts.

Small claims courts originated in the United States in 1913, and were designed to allow laborers and people without significant assets to recover money owed them through a judicial process that was more expeditious, less formal and more affordable than traditional litigation. Almost 100 years later, small claims courts are not only found in each of the fifty states, but in hundreds of countries around the world. It is a model that works because it is simple.

Small claims courts have become part of the social fabric in the United States. I say this because small claims courts represent

some of the best ideals that democracies embrace in terms of equal access to justice for all: that justice in the courts is not exclusively for the rich; that for some people, a dispute over 10,000 or 20,000 pesos is as important to them as a multi-million peso dispute is to a corporation; and finally, that every citizen can go to court for help, even if they cannot afford an attorney.

As these courts are established in the Philippines, you will likely experience a related phenomenon that occurs in many countries with small claims courts: people and businesses will be more likely to observe their legal obligations and the justice system will be more accessible and efficient. Whereas before, Filipinos are often frustrated by court delays, legal costs and a daunting judicial system; with a small claims court system in place, they can now go directly to court and file a simple

complaint that assures them that their case will be heard and a decision will be made within a reasonable timeframe.

In the coming months, we look forward to seeing these pilot small claims courts in action so that everyday Filipinos will have better access to justice. I am confident that these courts will improve the justice system and ultimately help the citizens of the Philippines have more confidence in their judicial system.

The U.S. Government looks forward to working with our partners in the justice sector, including the Supreme Court, on this and other efforts that we support to improve the administration of justice. We pledge our continued support.

On behalf of USAID, we congratulate the Chief Justice, the Supreme Court Technical Working Group on Small Claims Courts, and

the American Bar Association for this important effort.

Maraming salamat po at mabuhay tayong lahat.